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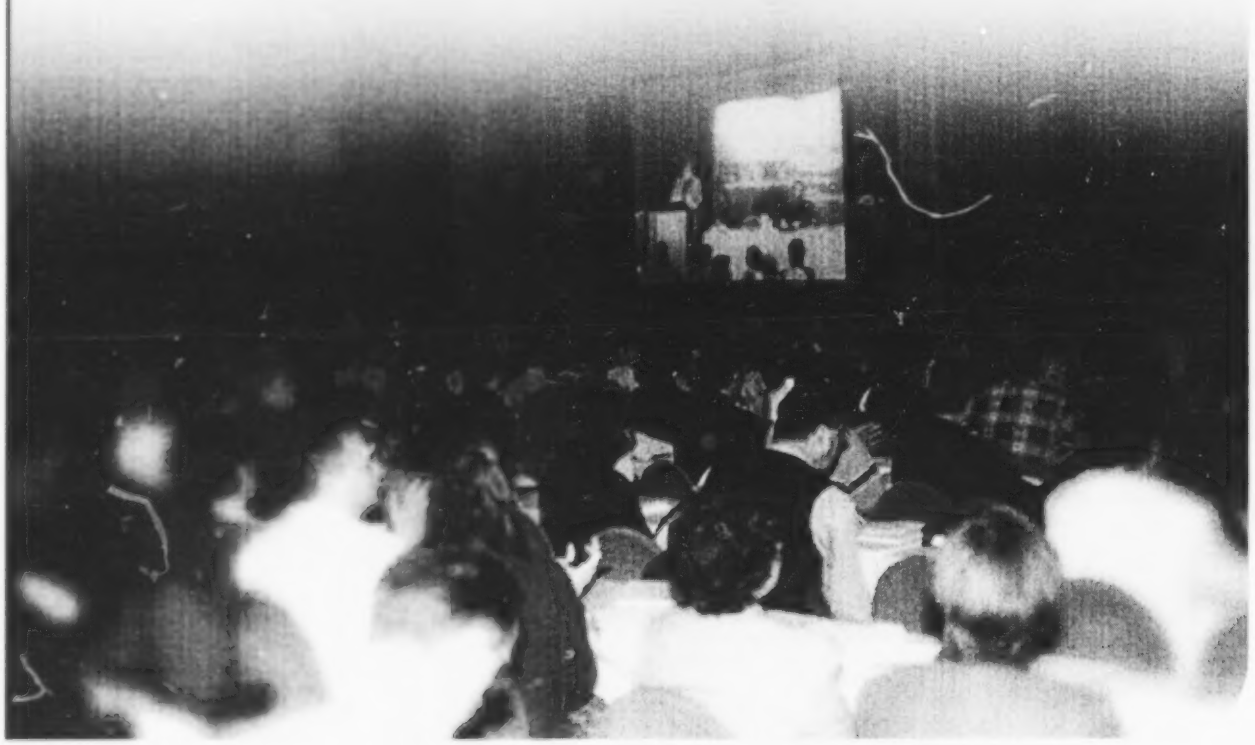

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A Fresh Sprint

By Eve Krakow

The consultative committees for secondary school met as a whole for the second time on October 17-18 at Mont St-Anne, giving a fresh boost to the work on the Québec Education Program for Secondary Cycle One. In the opening assembly, Margaret Rioux-Dolan clarified the mandate of these committees and called on members' active involvement and commitment.

This session was organized in response to feedback following the intensive two-day session held in February 2001 in St-Hyacinthe. "Many of you expressed the wish to work together and exchange ideas not just between committee members, but also between members of the different subject area committees so as to allow more sharing and greater coherence," explained Margaret Rioux-Dolan, director of the Direction de la formation générale des jeunes. The Ministère de l'Éducation was happy to meet this request, as it falls in line with the objectives and orientations of the reform.

Speaking on behalf of Robert Bisaillon, whose presence was required at a parliamentary commission, Rioux-Dolan welcomed conference participants and called on their commitment, expertise and determination as work continues for Secondary Cycle One. "I am sure that Mr. Bisaillon would have once again underlined the importance of the contribution and participation of all practitioners in the field—teachers, principals, pedagogical consultants and other school personnel—in this project," she said.

Last February, participants familiarized themselves with the orientations of the reform and its concepts, as well as the nature of their participation in developing the new curriculum. Participants also took the opportunity to share classroom practices, questions and concerns. "Since that meeting, each committee has progressed at its own rate, and no doubt new questions and issues have been raised," Rioux-Dolan said. She noted that some committees had to postpone meetings to allow the elementary teams to finalize their work. This session therefore marks both a continuation of work begun and a fresh start.

This year's objective is to develop the QEP for secondary school so as to have a continuous program from preschool up to Secondary III, based on the orientations already defined and aiming for a common-core basic education for all students, as outlined in the educational policy statement *Québec Schools on Course*. "This will require clarifying the links between the elementary program and that of Secondary Cycle One … while taking into account the realities specific to secondary education."

Committee members will work to clarify the links between the different elements that make up the program, i.e. the subject-specific competencies, cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning. They will give their points of view on the realism and pertinence of different aspects of the program, reflect on the needs of the young people who will be 'living' the program, and react to proposals concerning the essential knowledges.

Rioux-Dolan noted that the work of the consultative committees will be to concentrate on the spirit and tone of the program, the articulation of ideas, the content. The exact wording of the texts will be left to the writing committees.

She expressed several expectations for the work of consultative committee members. To begin with, each committee member should, ideally, carry out a consultation among their school or school board colleagues in order to gather comments and proposals to bring back to the committee.

"We also hope that each member will play an active role within their school or school board and the region they represent during teacher training activities organized to implement the programs of study."

It is also hoped that committee members will work with fellow teachers in their subject areas to develop learning situations and share this material with consultative committee members. As well, Rioux-Dolan called on committee members to try out learning situations in their classrooms incorporating the working hypotheses proposed by the committee and report on the results.

"This is a collective project for society as a whole; your commitment is essential to its success," Rioux-Dolan stated.

The Québec Education Program

By David Fuchs

Addressing participants at the meeting of the consultative committees for the Secondary Cycle One program, Margaret Rioux-Dolan, director of the Direction de la formation générale des jeunes (DFGJ), reviewed the main orientations of the Québec Education Program, which will serve as the basis for the Secondary Cycle One program.

In her introductory remarks, Rioux-Dolan talked about the changing job environment in which 75% of the workforce is involved in intellectual-related activities. Education is intended to bring out the complex intellectual abilities of students. It must not only inculcate knowledge but also help students to develop competencies so that they are able to update that knowledge. The events of September 11 have shown us that we need to prepare our young people to become citizens in a world that is becoming more and more complex.

Orientations of the Québec Education Program

The program balances the expectations of society with the needs of students who must develop abilities to adapt to important changes. Influenced by major trends in education and socio-constructivist currents, the choices that make up the elaboration of the program stem from and seek to change real-life practices.

Students are at the centre of their learnings and actively build their knowledge through personal intellectual involvement. Teachers are considered as professionals who cooperate among themselves, sharing a collegial responsibility towards their students.

While carrying changes forward, the program is in continuity with present practices; it doesn't invalidate them but rather brings them in line with the changes developing. It aims at a greater interdisciplinarity between subjects and an increased collaboration between the people involved.

The program also aims to provide a common and diversified education by enabling students to develop complex intellectual abilities through the basic learnings and by offering developmental profiles adapted to students' needs, interests and competencies.

Main characteristics of the QEP

The education program integrates the five main areas of learning and their related subjects. It is a common program that can be implemented in different ways according to each discipline.

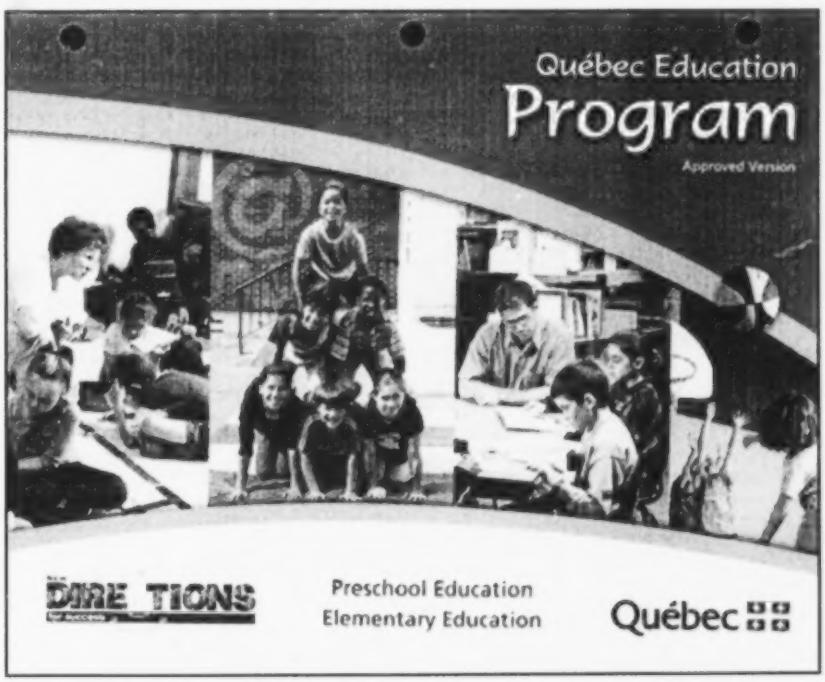
As a backdrop to the integration of learning, the education program also depends on cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning. These are developed through essential knowledges, techniques and strategies.

End-of-cycle outcomes help to focus on the major steps in competency development. Each student learns to recognize his or her achievements within the framework of very specific expectations.

These characteristics have remained unchanged throughout the different versions of the program, including the 2001 edition of the program, which is a new and improved version from that of the previous year. Although the changes are essentially in tone, the links between the competencies have been tightened and streamlined, and the number of competencies has been reduced: cross-curricular competencies have been reduced from 11 to 9. "Areas of lifelong learning" have been renamed " broad areas of learning" and are dealt with as more general areas that bring students in contact with different aspects of today's reality. The notion of a Program of Programs has been removed because some objected that it created ambiguity, giving the impression that it was another program within the Québec Education Program. End-of-cycle outcomes have been clarified to help teachers see the evolution of young peoples' education.

The Secondary Education Program

The program aims to be in continuity with the elementary school program: the main objectives and principal characteristics are carried forward. It will, however, need to be adapted to the reality of secondary school. The same objectives, namely to integrate cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning within specific subjects, must be presented in another fashion to reach our target public.



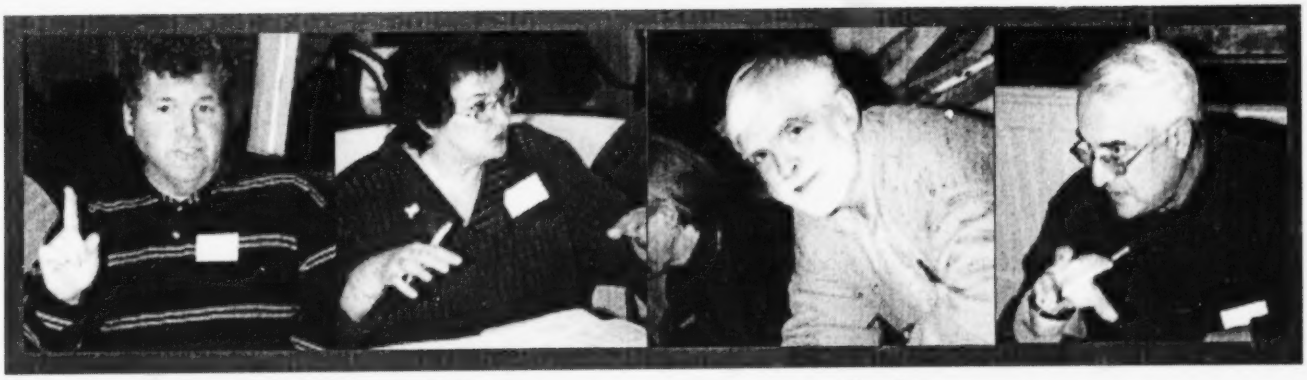
Rioux-Dolan ended her speech by stressing that we would be faced with much important work in the year to come, and she solicited everyone's collaboration to achieve the objective of integrating all aspects into the education program.

Règles

2003: The QEP Student

By David Fuchs,
Eve Krakow,
Claudine St-Germain and
Pascale Sauvé

In Wednesday's afternoon workshop, participants were asked to sketch a portrait of what a student who has gone through elementary school under the Québec Education Program might be like upon arriving in secondary school in 2003. In particular, participants had to think about the cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning that students would have developed, as well as the type of classroom and evaluation they would have gotten used to.



To avoid falling into the trap of idealizing students and assuming that they will have perfectly integrated every aspect of the QEP upon their arrival in secondary school, workshop leaders in the Cap Tourmente room gave each group a photograph of a child. Participants had to use this photo to first create a background for the student—personality, strengths and weaknesses, family environment—before thinking about how the QEP might shape the learning of such a child. The children in the pictures were of various ethnic origins and had different physical attributes.

Participants struggled with several issues in carrying out this exercise. For example, the QEP outlines what students are supposed to have achieved, but in reality, how much will children have integrated? Would students from different backgrounds react differently? For example, one group, working with the picture of a girl with a headscarf, hypothesized that a girl from a conservative family background might understand the concept of self-evaluation but be uncomfortable with it, still having the instinct to want to "please" the teacher.

Participants did seem to think the QEP will make students more used to working cooperatively and will help them develop their social and communication skills. Students will be used to searching for information from a variety of sources and working with a variety of media. Workshop participants also seemed to think the QEP would provide students who have difficulty in the traditional subjects with a wider variety of opportunities so that they will be able to find their "niche."

The following are four of the many portraits that emerged from the different workshops.

Maxime
(Jean-Larose, Group 14)

Maxime (Max for close friends) lives with his mom in a Montreal suburb and visits his dad on the weekends. Cap tight on his head, skateboard at his feet, he can't live without his Discman, his pager and his computer (which he uses to chat with for hours on end). Tommy Hilfiger T-shirt, oversized pants and Adidas court shoes: he's got the look!

Video game aficionado, he's an information and communication technologies crack. Having learnt to develop his creativity, he doesn't hesitate to use it whenever and wherever he can, occasionally being labeled as an eccentric… and being caught exercising his artistic talents on park benches.

In his opinion, school is above all a place where he can socialize with his friends. He enjoys teamwork, is able to cooperate with others and knows how to communicate his ideas convincingly. Some of these ideas about life in general include an openness onto the world and environmental awareness. He rants about consumer society and knows very well that the media don't always report the truth. He is aware of his rights and proclaims them at school and at home. He doesn't, however, seem to care that those rights include certain responsibilities…

He is aware of his strengths and weaknesses, being accustomed to self-evaluation and the evaluation from his peers. But for the moment, he isn't too inclined to work on his weak points. Academic results aren't a priority for him. As long as he passes, he is happy. Anyhow, he has developed strategies to make up for his difficulties in written French, his most glaring weakness (learning grammar rules is too boring for him): he takes advantage of team projects, letting his more talented teammates do the work. Cooperation is soooo cool!

Katerine
(Printemps, Group 7)

Upon entering secondary school, Katerine is a teenager with a cool head on her shoulders, her knapsack full of books and her portfolio under her arm. She is self-assured and knows what she wants. She is critical, especially when it comes to her education, and will protest at times. She is bright, curious, creative, spirited and willful without being undisciplined, even though she is smack in the middle of her teenage crisis. She exudes motivation. Passiveness and "brain-cramming" are things she despises. She wants to be intellectually active and always needs to have projects to work on.

Proud and independent, Katerine is constantly asking questions and looking for answers in her milieu. She is accustomed to learning from meaningful, reality-based situations: she is aware of her learning contexts and how she can use them in her everyday life. She has a liberal world-view that is informed and critical. She has learnt to develop ideas and to communicate them, to solve problems, to use proper methodology and to cooperate with others. Sociability runs in her veins! Like most teenagers of her generation, she handles a mouse and a keyboard better than a pencil.

Self-evaluation? No problem. It's become a habit for her. She finds it normal to be critical of her learning process, her work and herself. She is looking for solutions to better herself. That way, she gives herself new challenges and keeps on moving forward. A model student, no?

Vincent (Saint-Anne, Group 16)

Vincent is a typical youngster from a suburb of Montreal. He wears all the fashionable clothes and mimics all the "in" moves he's learnt from music videos. He comes from a middle class family of Italian origin, which means he speaks three languages, although none very well. His family plays an important role in his life, maybe even more so than his social circle. Having money to buy things is an important value for him. Sports are another important aspect of his life. School is somewhere he meets friends and where his parents send him, telling him how important it is to get an education. Although he doesn't seem to fully understand why.

However, he does have a "natural" feel for teamwork. Since this has become a cross-curricular competency in school, he has developed a certain amount of self-confidence in his abilities as well as a greater degree of autonomy and curiosity. He particularly enjoys holding sway over his classmates, although he tends to boil up when they don't all see things his way. Evaluation of his work doesn't affect him as negatively as it used to and he even has become more critical of his own work. He still doesn't care much for those subjects in which he lacks natural ability. And although he still wisecracks in his classes, he has learnt to respect the authority of his physical education and history teachers.

Joey (Cap Tourmente, Group 13)

One group's student was "Joey." Joey wore a baseball cap, posed with a tough slouch, sported tattoos and body piercings. When teachers saw his picture, they were immediately reminded of several of their own students: at-risk kids who don't fit into the current system, kids who aren't good readers and who tend to fall through the cracks.

"I'm sure you've all taught Joey before," said the group's spokesperson in presenting Joey to the larger group. "He was born here but his mother comes from Mexico and does shift work. He has very traditional values; he's an only child. He's an at-risk kid, a low achiever. He reacts negatively to criticism.

"He doesn't like school or teachers. He likes to sit in the back of the class, kind of slouching, to let you know he's not really interested. But he doesn't disturb. He obviously wants attention because he's got tattoos and about eight or nine body piercings, but he doesn't want to be judged for his outer appearance. He likes motorcycles, martial arts, music—he plays in a garage band and he's quite good. If you get past his crusty exterior he's quite gentle, he likes animals and has a great temperament."

The question is, how might such a kid turn out under the QEP? Maybe the new program wouldn't 'save' him, but it might help him out in certain areas, the group decided.

In terms of cross-curricular competencies, for example, Joey would be developing his work methods. "His work methods aren't strong, but he's gaining some."

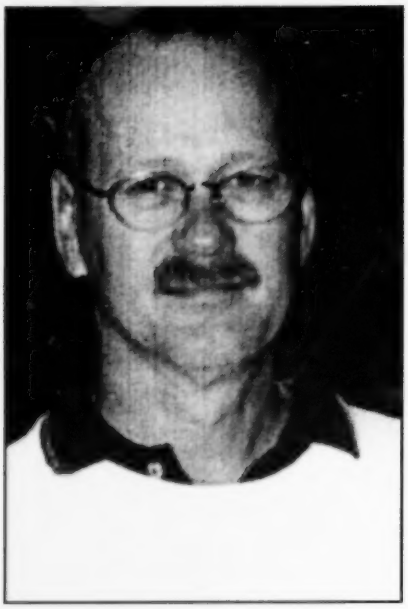
He would be learning to construct his identity, which is really important to him. "We saw some of that from the outside, but now it's beginning to really come out; he is learning how to express himself more appropriately, how to communicate his values." As well, the arts give him a chance to develop his talents, to explore his creativity and to express himself.

This is not a student who is naturally strong in English languages arts or interested in reading, but the integration of different kinds of media have drawn him in. "He might not be into Shakespeare, but he'll be reading magazine articles and movie reviews." In the same way, while he's never been too good at math and science, the integration of ICT is very motivating, because he's quite media-savvy.

Although he tends to reject a lot of his cultural heritage ("which is typical of a lot of kids"), he has a male Spanish teacher who he really likes and who has become a kind of role model for him. He is therefore starting to embrace some of these values. In social sciences, a unit on democracy is close to his heart because he has to look closely at some of the racism he has experienced in Montreal.

Joey understands the criteria for evaluation because he's been creating rubrics and criteria for self-evaluation. "However, we're not sure whether he always take it into account in doing his work."

Finally, his portfolio is surprising—it's not what you would expect when looking at him. His writing samples are good and thoughtful, and the portfolio is quite artistic. There are also a few CDs that he's burned to show some of his other talents. "Because no matter what, we still tend to judge a kid by what they look like; that's just how we're made."



Testimony

Broadening One's Perspective

Interview by Jean-Pierre Bernard

The passage from an elementary to a secondary education program entails many challenges. Bernard Gagnon, a teacher at Polyvalente Nicolas-Gatineau (Commission scolaire des Draveurs) and a member of both the consultative and writing committees in geography, offers his own view on the essentials for supporting ... exercise. We met with him on the eve of the two-day session.

JPB: What are the expectations of the teachers participating in the consultative committee meetings?

BG: In my case, as the representative for social sciences (secondary) in my school board, it's mainly a question of listening to the concerns of my colleagues who are living the classroom reality with all its challenges and limitations. When you listen to teachers talk about what goes on in their classrooms on a day-to-day basis, and you hear them wondering about the 'why' of the reform and particularly the 'how,' you quickly come down from the clouds and back to reality. During these meetings, the relationship between the consultative committees and the writing committees is one of reflection, dialogue and consensus between the program writers and the practitioners. The perspectives put forth by these teachers enable us to target more concrete and useful aspects when writing the program.

JPB: What are the most important challenges in implementing the new Québec Education Program in secondary school?

BG: The biggest challenge is the concept of integrating the different subject areas; integration is a word that scares secondary school teachers. In elementary school, teachers wear all hats, so they can more easily integrate the different subject areas. But the current reality in secondary school doesn't allow for this kind of uniformity and follow-through in students' learning. The concept of integration means that, in the context of my own classroom, I have to know the teachers who are teaching my students information technology and French. So I have to find a way of doing things that creates connections between all these people.

In my opinion, the gateway offered by the cross-curricular competencies is one that should be considered in the integration of competencies. The integration of secondary school subjects involves the integration of the subject-specific competencies, the broad areas of learning and the cross-curricular competencies. The aspects of the learning process developed by our students also need to be taken into account in this exercise of constructing knowledge.

JPB: Will our teachers have a hard time cutting loose from their subject-specific teaching?

BG: I'd say yes and no. No, because I have been trained in strategic learning, and I see the construction of knowledge as a matter of process rather than content. In teaching, it's no longer the subject matter that excites me, but the processes developed by the student and the transfer of these processes to other learning activities.

Yes, because unless the school boards provide teachers with adequate training in different pedagogical practices (such as strategic learning), teachers will have a very difficult time seeing teaching through glasses other than those of their own discipline. They'll see only the subject matter.

With the delivery date we have for the Secondary Cycle One, we'll have to provide teachers with very concrete models and tools if we are to convince them that the principles proposed by the reform are feasible. Teachers will have to review the student-teacher relationship and transform their role from one of merely transmitting information to one where they help the student construct his or her own knowledge. Teaching is no longer just a one-man show—it involves a variety of actors both behind the scenes and on stage.

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